

Letter to Editor

Are mothers of preschool children from rural Sri Lanka aware of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)?R. Randika¹, S. Sendanayaka², G. Rathnayaka², J. Warnasekara^{2*}¹Faculty of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka²Department of Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine and Allied Sciences, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka**Keywords:** Awareness, Early Childhood Care and Development, Rural, Sri Lanka, ECCD**Copyright:** © 2021 Randika R. *et al.*  This is an open-access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.**Funding:** None**Competing interest:** None**Received:** 12.06.2021**Accepted revised version:** 29.11.2021**Published:** 31.12.2021*✉ **Correspondence:** jwarnasekara@yahoo.com,  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6554-6851>**Cite this article as:** Randika R. *et al.*, Are mothers of preschool children in rural Sri Lanka aware of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)? *Anuradhapura Medical Journal* 2021; 15 (2): 6-8, DOI: <http://10.4038/amj.v15i2.7688>

Sir,

Focusing on early childhood development and, thereby, the early brain development is an investment, especially for low and middle-income countries [1,2]. Deficiencies of early childhood care influence the child's survival, growth, and development and these changes could be irreversible during later life [3]. Therefore, empowering the public with knowledge and skills in early childhood care is a major public health strategy [4]. Despite the low level of practical knowledge and public interest in early childhood care and development (ECCD), it has improved rapidly during recent years [5,6]. Although health promotion programmes are conducted at central level, it is questionable whether the beneficial effects of these programmes penetrate sufficiently to the rural areas of the country. We conducted a descriptive cross-sectional study among randomly selected mothers who have preschool children in Jayanthipura village in Polonnaruwa district to determine the knowledge regarding the concept of ECCD and its practical issues. A pretested self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data.

There were 152 participants. Although all the participants have heard about ECCD, 90 (59.2%) of them accepted that they had inadequate practical knowledge on ECCD, including its advantages and practices for brain development. The most common source of

information regarding ECCD was the public health midwife (Table 1).

Of all the mothers, 147 (96.7%) knew that the concept of ECCD was mentioned in the Child Health Development Record (CHDR). However, only 97 (63.8%) knew the exact period of ECCD to be from conception to 5 years, and 95 (62.5%) subjects knew that 80% of the brain network is developed by the time a child reaches three years of age. More than 80% of the mothers considered mental growth and intelligence as the only known advantages of ECCD (Table 1).

Many practices influence the development of the brain, including day-to-day practices such as proper feeding and food preparation [6]. Nevertheless, satisfactory awareness was observed only regarding the way of affording the stimulations for brain development. In contrast, the awareness is highly inadequate on simple day-to-day practices such as caring for pregnant and lactating mothers, proper food preparation, and proper feeding.

The findings of this study reflect the deficiencies of knowledge transmission to rural areas. Further studies are essential to find out the exact reasons for these deficiencies and to evaluate the best modes of knowledge dissemination, particularly to the communities in need. Improving the knowledge regarding the ECCD concept and its importance is essential to establish behavioural changes necessary to promote ECCD. As the role of

public health midwives, medical officers of health, and medical personnel in obstetric and paediatric care provision is unique to promote ECCD in the community successfully, any deficiencies related to each level of care provider must be researched. It has been considered that practical activities are essential as the skill development of the caregiver is the basis of the psychosocial development of children [7]. Deficiencies related to practical aspects of knowledge dissemination

may have been reflected in the results of this study. Attention must be drawn towards the key childcare practices such as food preparation, storage, and proper feeding, as it directly correlates with the growth and development of the child. It is high time for Sri Lanka to focus on improving the standards of child development as it is a globally recognized as an investment for a country.

Table 1: Source of knowledge, awareness on advantages of ECCD, and practices influencing brain development during early childhood.

	n	%
Source of knowledge		
<i>Public Health Midwives</i>	128	84.2
<i>Maternal and Child Health Clinics</i>	112	73.7
<i>Neighbors or Relations</i>	84	55.3
<i>Media</i>	11	7.2
Awareness about the advantages of ECCD		
<i>Mental growth</i>	140	92.1
<i>Intelligent thinking</i>	129	84.9
<i>Ability to argue</i>	114	75.0
<i>Communication capability</i>	104	68.4
<i>Ability to connect with others</i>	100	65.8
Knowledge on practices influencing the brain development		
<i>The way of affording stimulations</i>	127	83.6
<i>Caring pregnant & lactating mothers</i>	77	50.7
<i>Proper feeding</i>	67	44.1
<i>Proper food preparation and storage</i>	60	39.5

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